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## **Abstract**

When I was a child, I grew up in a world without time – I was able to do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted. But, as I grew older, my life became dominated by the clock. Later in my life, I was introduced to Buddhism, and through the development of the practice of meditation, I was able to regain a sense of timelessness. A short time later, when visiting natural caves, I discovered timelessness in these spaces. The random structure, the tunnels, and the surface textures inspired me to invoke the idea of caves as a metaphor for my sculptures. As I progressed with my art, and specifically with the generation of ceramic sculptures, I realized my art was evolving through meditation, and my studio practice was allowing me to separate myself from time. In essence, working with clay was my meditative practice and, as such, separated from time, allowing my sculptures to become free-form, and less illustrative or representative of cave-like structures, and more of a celebration of nature. My thesis is about how my work evolved timelessness through sculptural works and how Chris Gustin, Eva Hild, Yung-hsu Hsu, and Beth Darry influenced me in different stages of my art practice and allowed me to experiment with other sculptural forms and possibilities. In addition, ceramic sculptor Yung-hsu Hsu's philosophies of making work speak directly to me, to my art, and to the concept of timelessness in the studio practice. Ultimately, the ability to separate time from my studio practice, through meditation, led me to the development of my thesis work: *A Space without Time*.

A Space Without Time

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Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Studio Arts.

Syracuse University

May 2024

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Professor Margie Hughto for her advice, guidance, patience, and support for my ideas and projects. She was always accessible, and her warm greeting always lit up my day.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee, Peter Beasecker, Emily W Stokes-Rees, and Errol Willett, for their interest, support and discussion during my studio visits and reviews. I appreciated and valued all the suggestions they provided.

Long-Hui Chen, my Buddhist spiritual teacher who helped me when I was lost and depressed and at the bottom. He guided me to a life-changing path and the practice of meditation. By his encouragement, I re-started my education journey when I was still working full time in the fashion industry in New York City. Even though it took me more than ten years to earn my BFA from Queens College, CUNY, his confidence and guidance gave me the strength to leave my full-time job in NYC and apply to the MFA program at Syracuse University.

I am also indebted to my mentors, Professor Sin-Ying Ho and the incomparable Bruce Dehnert, who have broadened my perspective of the art world and taught me their philosophy on the creation of art. Their approach to art as life inspired me to immerse myself in the creation of art through my studio practice every day.

And finally, thanks to my beloved, William Carty, who came into my life with unconditioned love, support, and patience. He brought me beauty and happiness, and because of him, I am not alone on this journey. I dedicate all of my work to him.

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## **Introduction**

I was trapped in the repetitive cycle of “time” in the modern world. From another perspective, I was drowning in the “sea of desire”: the never-ending struggle for things and status. It was at this point, when I was at rock bottom, that I was introduced to my Buddhist spiritual teacher Long-Hui Chen. He guided me to the right path through instruction and the practice of meditation. The process was similar to learning to swim, first just floating on the sea with a swim ring. But as I progressed with learning and meditation, my spiritual teacher encouraged me to take off the swim ring and actually swim. He told me that I am ready to dedicate my energy to my art practice as part of my continuing journey and practice of living in this world.

Our thoughts are changeable; they come and go. During my practice of meditation, I learned to focus on a spot and not to respond to or chase any random thoughts that come into my brain, allowing me to enter a meditative state. The meditative state is a space where time no longer exists. My art practice, through working with clay, allows me to focus in a similar manner as meditation. When I work with clay, as when I meditate, I am released from the constraints of time.

When I first time entered a cave, I was moved by the surrounding environment, the tunnel structure, the texture, the patterns of the rocks...etc. Also, the way that time seems to be suspended in that space reminded me of similar experiences during my early childhood and later in meditation. The connection between these ideas and feelings became an essential concept of artwork for me.

In this paper, I will talk about how I was inspired and created an artwork series *Cave*. I will show and talk about Howe Caverns, Secret Caverns, and Taroko National Park, places that I



had physically visited, and how they are connected to my thesis of *A Space Without Time*. I will explain why tunnels and ruffles are key elements of my artwork. I have selected several artists who have inspired me to evolve at each stage and will investigate the connection between my work and their work. These include, but are not limited to, Chris Gustin, Eva Hild, Yung-hsu Hsu, and Beth Darry. I will discuss how they produce their work and how my work relates to theirs. Further I will examine ceramic sculptor Yung-hsu Hsu, who like me, was also born in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and how his philosophies of making work relate to my subject and my art.

*“Actually, being in the present, if we can only put some effort and some attention to it, it’s more easier than being in the past and the future. Simply is because, the present is there, right in front of you... people are finding it difficult to habituate themselves to be in the present. Because they have so much habit being in the past and future...It’s difficult. Selling the dream is easier...”*

-- Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse<sup>1</sup>

## **Time has Begun**

As a child in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, one of my favorite things to do was dig clay out of the field and make things to play with. We lived near a rice farm in a rural area, and I have fond memories of an open space with gentle breezes, the neighboring farmer passing by each morning and evening with his ox, and the general feeling of peace and connection to the earth.

I existed in a world with no concept of time, playing in the fields with my brother and sister, doing whatever I wanted until it was time for a meal, announced by my grandmother, who would call us back home to eat. This idyllic childhood abruptly ended when I left the rice farm to attend elementary school and to live with my aunt and uncle in the city.

I was forced to learn and adopt modern customs and rules practically overnight: obey the traffic light to cross the street; read the clock so as to be on time for school; use proper manners in the classroom; etc. It was culture shock combined with homesickness.

I longed for the weekends, when my parents would pick me up and take me back to the rice farm. Every Saturday morning, I packed and got ready for them to show up, standing by the front door waiting and staring at the clock on the wall. Seconds, minutes, and sometimes hours, passed as I waited for them. And sometimes they did not arrive before the sun set and I would cry myself to sleep. Then, without warning, when I was 10 years old, my father passed away from a sudden illness and I felt all alone in the world. He had shielded me from the world, but after his passing, my life changed and I was quickly forced to assimilate into my surroundings.

## **The Concept of Time**

Since elementary school and over the years, I assimilated into the modern world: a better job, more money, a better car or house. I lived according to the clock: at the train station on-time, at my office on-time, attend meetings on-time, meet project deadlines on-time, be on-time for night classes, the doctor's office for an appointment, make dinner by 5:00 PM, etc. I had lost myself and had become a slave to the time stream, helpless to separate my life from the clock.

During elementary school, I adapted to the constraints of the modern world. But through a series of events outside of my control, I immigrated to the United States in 1986 when I was 16 years old, landing in Pittsburgh. With this move, I continued to be assimilated into the modern world, but also lost, nearly completely, my connection to my native Taiwan. In many ways, I was alone in the world, disconnected from family, friends, and homeland.

In 2004, after I gave birth to my second child, the accumulation of suppressed emotions broke free, and I entered into a deep depression. Everyday routines reinforced the idea that I was stuck in a space that I could not escape. I grew desperate, but I could not find a way to change my life. I was hopeless and had no avenue of escape.

One day, through a series of seemingly unrelated events, I was introduced to my spiritual teacher. He became a father figure to me, filling the hole created by the sudden death of my father 15 years previously. He slowly taught me to let go of things that I thought were important, explaining, gently, that the only way to cure my heart's emptiness was by becoming self-aware. Only by letting go of the material things around me could I patch the holes in myself and eliminate the need for the things of the modern world.

Looking back at this time, I realized that my growth in self-awareness was connected to returning to school to study fine arts. While working full time in Manhattan, New York City, I

spent all of my weeknights and weekends at the ceramics studio. Working with clay allowed me to enter a personal meditative space, with a mood that was reminiscent of my childhood: simple and free of worldly constraints. Through this “**progress of time,**” making artwork in ceramics allowed me to relax, healed my depression, and fundamentally changed the way I perceived the world.

In many of the teachings of Rinpoche and other Buddhist monks, I have come to understand that “Time” is a perception, created by **chains of thought**. The meditative practice is to train the mind to not think and, when thought ceases, a peaceful space appears. But as soon as the mind starts thinking, that space disappears. Working on clay provided me with the space that I needed to reconnect with the peacefulness of my childhood and eventually became the nutrient and inspiration for my body of ceramic work in graduate school.

### **Finding Space between Time**

In early 2021, I was looking through some photos I had taken at Howe Caverns in Schoharie County, New York, and I was reminded of the joy and childlike wonder I felt when I visited these caves on several occasions with different groups of friends. It amazed me how nature can use the simple raw materials of rock and water to create these extraordinary textures, shapes, and colors, as shown in Figure I. I was especially interested in the relationship of natural beauty and the practical form it takes as spaces and tunnels. The most surprising feeling I experienced in the caves was timelessness. This feeling was similar to the feelings I experienced during meditation: *The space between time*.



Figure I. Howe Caverns (Schoharie County, New York).\*

Although I have been living in the U.S. for 35 years, and have adopted western culture, I feel that I am still significantly influenced by the eastern culture of my childhood. When making my artwork I am drawn to nature. By using nature as *metaphors* to illustrate Buddhism, it to me is essential. The isolation and solitude of caves, as well as their natural beauty and immense scale, fit this concept perfectly.

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\* Personal photographs by the author, June 22, 2021.

There is a particular spot in a cave system that is my favorite: a corridor that loops. In the loop, people walk in from one side and come out the other side. This corridor is so narrow only one person can walk through at a time. The walls of the corridor seemed to flow and contained subtle patterns and textures on the rock surface that extended up into the darkness and disappeared. Every way I turned my head I saw something different and unexpected.

My research to understand caves is derived from images, cave adventure videos from YouTube, and visiting actual caves (Howe Caverns and Secret Caverns in New York State). I have read about geology as well, thinking about how earth, sand, dirt, clay, and rock relate to ceramics. Through my research, I understand that caves can be formed in several ways, with differences in structure, color, and texture. But my goal is not to mimic caves precisely, but to use these images to provide ideas for how to approach my art.

### **The Vase-Like Sculptures**

When I first started this body of work, the way I constructed my sculptures was related to the processes of traditional functional ware, similar to that used to construct vases. At this stage, I was very much influenced by American Ceramist Chris Gustin:<sup>2</sup>

*“...I use the pot context because of its immense possibilities for abstraction. The skin of the clay holds the invisible interior of the vessel. How I manipulate my forms “around” that air, constraining it, enclosing it, or letting it expand and swell, can allow analogy and metaphor to enter into the work...”*

His work models human form in terms of shape and size. I am particularly drawn by how the space is contained within the form, as shown in Figure II. But the surface of his forms seem to float, providing a sense of expanding and collapsing simultaneously.



Figure II. Chris Gustin: *Vessel #9932* (left, 1999) and *Vessel with Neck #0801* (right, 2008).<sup>3</sup>

The influence of Chris Gustin, however, was not about the idea or concept of his work, but about his building technique. I was inspired by the way that he starts with a flat base and then coil builds the form, ending with a neck opening similar to a vase. This approach offered a reasonable path for me to build sculptures reminiscent of caves and cave structures, as shown in Figure III.

I learned of his technique through a video interview, and how he pushed the form from the inside to create a bump or pushed from the outside to form a dent.<sup>4</sup> This technique allowed me to construct cave-like walls using a vase form. With this approach, the form could progress, adding tunnels through the body, invent vase openings, and sculpt external surfaces similar to the ruffled edges on a formal gown.

Although both of our artworks relate to air and space, Gustin's work is about the air contained *within* the form, while my work is about how air flows *through* the form. The air within the form is similar to how people talk about their body energy, within an individual body. But the air flow through the form, invokes the concept that the air travels throughout a body like blood flowing through blood vessels.

The tunnel with a wave edge opening is based on concepts that are related to my experiences learned from my meditation practice. During meditation, the energy within me flows and travels through my body, meeting and connecting with the surrounding space. Because of this experience, it makes me understand that all energy travels and interacts with the surrounding space. Therefore, the tunnels and wave lines on my artwork serve as energy conduit that interact with space.



Figure III. *Cave Vessel #2* (left); *Cave Vessel #3* (center), and *Cave Vessel #4* (right); Stoneware Cone 10 reduction, glazed (2021).



## **Landscape Forms: *Josephine, Ruby, Mia***

I then started thinking about how to expand my sculpture to be more landscape-like, instead of a single object formed from the ground up. To expand my research, I visited Secret Caverns, another cave system in New York State. I also found images of Taroko National Park (located in Taiwan) that I had visited during my elementary school trip, and many other cave systems found around the world.

Caves from different locations can form from different materials. Limestone is the most common cave material,\* so slightly soluble in water that it takes thousands of years to create pathways and chambers in the rock. Caves can also form from other rocks, such as chalk, dolomite, marble, salt, gypsum, lava, and ice (known as “Ice caves” in cold climates). The range of materials also opened up the color palate for my landscape sculptures, as shown in Figure IV.

To enrich the surfaces, I started experimenting with mixed glaze colors. I also thought about how to mimic a pond of water on the ground or water running over the surface of a wall, in a manner similar to what I had observed in the caves. To obtain the illusion of running water, I used glass beads that melted and flowed over the surface. I glued blue glass beads to the sculpture, in different locations (depending on my goal) so that at high temperature the glass beads would melt and run down the surface or form pools reminiscent of small ponds at the base of the sculpture.

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\* <https://mostateparks.com/page/55117/cave-geology#:~:text=Limestone%20and%20dolomite%20are%20the,rocks%20that%20form%20solution%20caves>.



Figure IV. *Josephine*, 2021 (upper left, stoneware, cone 10 reduction, glazed, glass); *Ruby*, 2021 (upper right, stoneware, cone 10 reduction, glazed, glass); and *Mia*, 2021 (left, stoneware, cone 10 reduction, glazed, glass).

## **Finding My Childhood Memory**

Most cave parks and tourist locations have regulations that ask the participant not to touch the cave surface. This is because sunscreen, body lotion or any other products on our skin can stain the cave wall surface and interfere with the natural processes in the cave. When dust settles on the oil it can make stains that can grow darker with time, and the oil on the surface can inhibit further cave growth.<sup>5</sup>

In the privately owned Secret Caverns, I was allowed to touch the cave walls. I could feel the shape, temperature, and texture. The walls were cold, smooth, and moist. In addition, I was able to put my hand into the water flowing along the ground originating from some unseen place and disappearing after a short exposure in the cave. In the cave, there was no outside world to interfere with my emotions and thoughts. I was simply present in the cave's space, only me and the cave, and thus timeless!!

Every morning when I wake up, I am excited to go to my studio. Many times, as soon as I have taken the cover off my in-progress artwork, I enter a timeless zone, a kind of meditative state. The work of my hands is automatic, repeatedly pinching and kneading the clay until I become tired and realize my vision is foggy. I then look up to realize that the day is ending. Sometimes, if I took a break and fixed some food, I would be transported with the clay and my food would still be there but now cold. The whole day has lapsed. For me, touching the clay provides me with an experience similar to the suspension of time I felt in the cave.

When I am building a sculpture, I have the sensation of touching the surface in a cave: slick surfaces, coolness, sharp and pointy or rounded and dull. My studio workspace has a similar effect and feeling to that of a cave. Thus, I am joyful in my studio.

**Asymmetrical: *Lavender, Amplify, Emilia***

After my vase-like sculptures, I became interested in eliminating the flat bottom to make the form more lifted, less formal, and more interactive with space. In addition, I wanted to open up my sculptures to provide a yin/yang character, in the form of positive and negative spaces. Eva Hild's outdoor sculpture *Wave*<sup>6</sup> at the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum at Alfred University (Figure V), and other examples of her work on her website (Figure VI),<sup>7</sup> possess this sort of inverted space. As noted on her website, she starts with clay and forms sculptures in a manner similar to mine. Her sculptural forms provided me with ideas on how to open up my forms to provide different perspectives. It is not just walking around to see how the tunnels intersect with each other but seeing inside and outside of the structure at the same time.



Figure V. Eva Hild, *Wave*, 2019 (white-painted aluminum, 3.5 x 2.4 meter), Alfred University, Alfred, New York.<sup>6</sup>

My sculptures *Lavender*, *Amplify*, and *Emilia* (Figure VII) are intentionally asymmetrical. I am attempting to convey a sense of movement by using organic forms to create compositions that mimic the movement implied in geology. The columns are sometimes thin but other times thick with diagonal and curved lines that convey a feeling of instability and motion. Some of the corridors are open, exposing the interior structure, inviting the viewer to experience both the positive and negative spaces created within my sculptures.



Figure VI. Eva Hild, *Lace*, 2018 (Hand-built stoneware, mixed material, and pigmented silicate paint, 27.5” x 15.5” x 21.5”).<sup>7</sup>

In the process of making these sculptures, it occurred to me that the sculptures did not need to have any formal orientation. Perhaps the forms could rest several ways functioning as individual pieces or combined to create a larger sculpture.

My sculptures are complex and convey a sense of movement and instability that creates illusions and different viewing perspectives. This is meant to convey to people the message that things may not always be what we first think they are, nor what we first see – different angles provide alternative perspectives. From these changing perspectives it becomes evident that there may be another truth or reality revealed within the same object that can become evident simply by viewing it from a different angle.



Figure VII. *Lavender*, 2021 (upper left, stoneware cone 6 oxidation, glazed); *Amplify*, 2022 (upper right, stoneware unglazed); *Emilia*, 2021 (left, stoneware unglazed).

## Different Scales Series

Sometimes the change is simply in the size of the sculpture, obtained by increasing or decreasing the scale. Initially I started experimenting with sculptures that were similar in size to a table lamp. I then experimented with a more intimate scale, such as the size of a cantaloupe, that could be held in my hands and flipped around, but also functioned as a vase (Figure VIII). Eventually, I started to increase the scale, composing larger sculptures of multiple parts that could be assembled, where pieces the size of a basketball could be combined to create a structure that was desk size (Figure IX). At this time, as shown in Figure X, I also experimented with making sculpture that could be hung on the wall incorporating a copper sheet as a backdrop. From these collections emerged new ideas on how to combine forms and experiments as to how different forms might work together.

In terms of surface color and texture, I tend to choose dull colors and simpler surfaces when the piece is more complex, allowing the viewer to evaluate the details of the structure more easily. But as the scale of my sculptures increased, the structure tends to be more simplified, so I chose more intense colors to brighten the surface and also to create a more complex, messy, and uneven surface (Figure XI). To create more complicated surfaces, I employed slips and glazes, but I also tool the raw surface to create texture. These alterations are intended to confuse the viewer's eye. In addition, I sometimes use dark colors to suggest a hidden and poorly illuminated environment and light colors to invoke a colder environment (Figure XII).



Figure VIII. *Hold in Hand* series: A, B, C, D, 2022, stoneware cone 6 oxidation, glazed.





Figure IX. *Combined series: Untitled*, 2022 & 2023, stoneware wood fired, salt soda fired, unglazed.

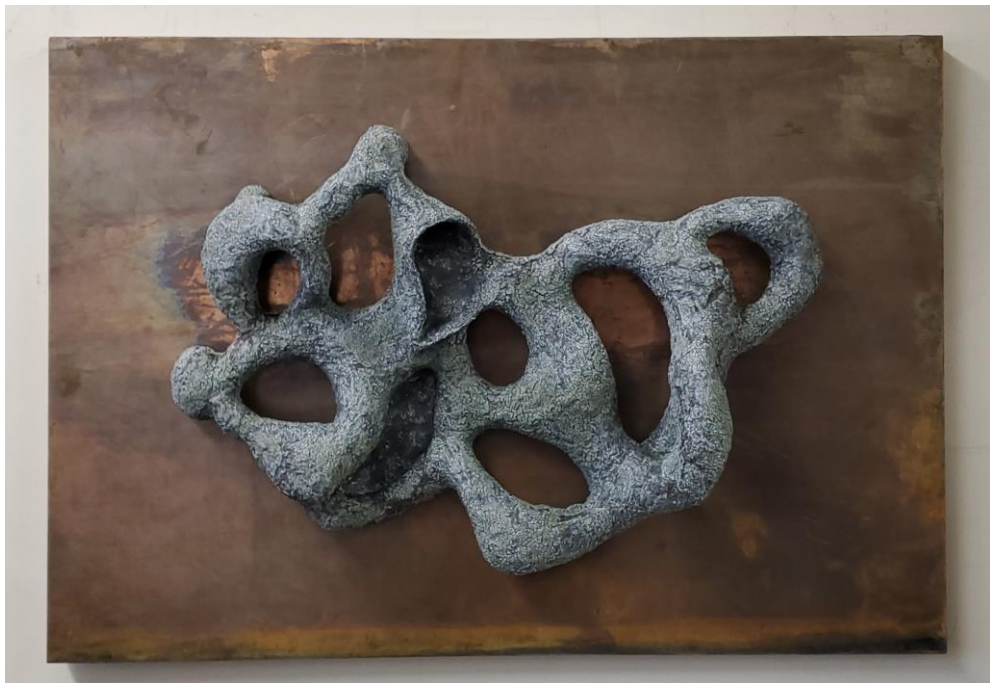


Figure X. *Yvette*, 2022, stoneware cone 6 oxidation, glazed, copper, wood.



Figure XI. *Hannah*, 2023 (left) and *Chloe*, 2022 (right), stoneware cone 6 oxidation, glazed.



Figure XII. *In the Dark I & II*, 2023, red stoneware soda fired, color slips, unglazed.

## Let Go & Embrace

I have discovered I have a connection with ceramic sculptor Yung-hsu Hsu , who was also born in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. In one of his interviews from Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Art (Kaohsiung, Taiwan) he stated:<sup>8</sup>

*“...The stress is a kind of tormenting stress on my mind and body...which is through a kind of continuous self-inflicted tortures, you wait and see what will happen in the end. Through this method, you can find yourself. You have to find your boundary to break through it. ...”*

I have a similar mentality. As an artist, it is very important that I am continuously making work and pushing myself beyond that boundary: “What else can I make and create beyond my current work?” while still enjoying the process of making. This boundary is about finding new building techniques or other possibilities for working with clay to create large sculptures.

For example, later in the same interview:

*“...I just grabbed a handful of clay and started to press and knead it, until it became a cup-shape thing (Figure XIII). The more I pressed, the thinner it became and then I put it on the shelf ...After I got tired, or got stuck with my creation work, I repeated the same process, it happened several times a day. I was completely unaware of what I was doing over there, I just kept on kneading the clay in my hands...and after some days, I accidentally noticed I had created (Figure XIV). It was these things that inspired me. Not creating a work for the sake of creation...”* (“Figure XIII” and “Figure XIV” were added.)

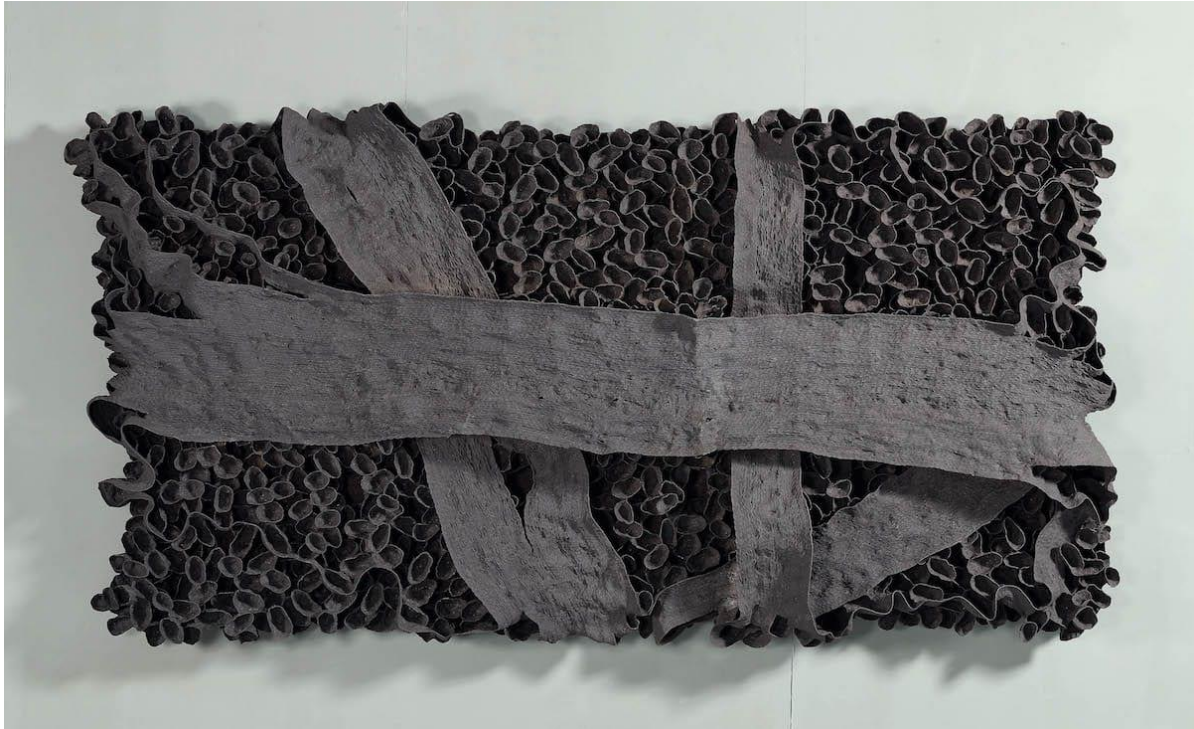


Figure XIII. Yung-hsu Hsu, *2018-11*, 2018.<sup>9</sup>

When my brain is over “thinking” ideas, it creates a dilemma and I find it difficult to create work. I notice that when I am relaxed and calm, and in a meditative mood, I am in a peaceful “space” and the ideas just float through the black cloud, leading my hands to pinch and knead the clay until the form is completed. In that “space”, I am able to spend hours in my studio working and not notice the time that has passed.



Figure XIV. Yung-hsu Hsu, *2017-15*, 2017.<sup>9</sup>

## Spiritual Practice

After I grew out of my depression, meditation became a very important everyday spiritual practice for me. When I first learned how to meditate, just like everybody else, I would sit in a quiet corner, cross both of my legs, and gently rest my hands on my lap. My eyes were trained on a spot in front of me and I would slowly enter a meditative state. This is the basis of meditation, but the first step for beginners: to train their active minds to not think and their wild heart to calm down. The next step is to extend this peaceful state of mind into daily activity. It was necessary to train myself to have awareness, and not to be drawn into my surroundings that disturbs my peaceful mind. This is similar to what I mentioned earlier regarding “Time” – it is a perception created by **chains of thought**. I eventually realized I could extend my meditation practice into making my work.

Osho’s book “*Creativity*” explains that things made through the mind and thought are intellectual and logical, but therefore limited. Creativity, however, is the opposite of intellect and logic. When your heart dances, and coexistence is harmonious and integrated into one, creativity becomes unlimited. You don’t need to think to have an idea. Those ideas will appear and will be unlimited.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, as I strive to extend my meditation practice into making my work, it seems that my studio practice and Osho’s approach have a similar foundation. I also often feel that my hands are not moving fast enough to keep up with my ideas.

Even though the “cave” was the object of nature that inspired my work initially, my spiritual growth has taken me in a different direction. My sculptures are abstract, taking form intuitively from my meditation. I occasionally still look at cave images as inspiration to help me achieve “that” idea, but my work is no longer trying to obtain that unachievable spectacular

experience of the cave, but rather to celebrate nature. My sculptures reflect images that occur throughout nature: mountains, sea coral, flowers, trees, etc. They can be part of a surface or cut from the ground.

### **Rough and Smooth Series: *Eileen***

I am interested in experimenting with ways to make my work show more definition between raw to smooth surfaces like I had seen in nature. I am interested in the surfaces formed as the limestone may be carved or may grow over a raw rock surface. In my earlier work, I used slips, crawling and underfired glazes, or tools to create marks that interrupted the flow depicting a textured surface. But this technique was limited and could only be used to a certain extent to increase the unevenness, falling short of the surface texture I wished for.

After working on a piece, forming and trimming to obtain the ruffled form with tunnels and holes, I discovered that I had a mound of left-over recycled porcelain clay. The pile of lumps of clay possessed a beautiful organic texture and irregular surface shape. This pile of trimmed clay possessed the yin/yang and smooth/rough surface texture I was trying to achieve for my work. From this beginning, I started to pile a lump of clay spontaneously as a base, and then build a cave structure above it to create a form that seems to have grown organically from uneven ground.

The sculpture *Eileen* (Figure XV) was then subjected to wood firing. The unglazed bisque sculpture during the firing process, the wood ash and smoke from the wood kiln interacted with the bisque surface creating a variety of effects. The uneven ground texture topped with a structure of tunnels, holes and interwoven ruffles successfully catches the settling ash which then melts, creating a glaze-like effect with organic and unplanned colors.



Figure XV. *Eileen*, 2023, porcelain wood fire, unglazed.

These yin/yang smooth/rough sculptures successfully represented and extended my ideas greatly. This technique provides a new approach to creating sculptures from the ground up. Because of these results I have many ideas that I will invoke when forming new sculptures as my work progresses (Figure XVI).



Figure XVI. *Untitled wall piece*, (left, 2023), stoneware, salt soda fired, glazed. *Untitled*, (right, 2023), stoneware, salt soda fired, glazed.

**Window Screen: *Hold My World in Place***

One of the interesting structures I had seen in both actual caves and in photographs of other caves, is how limestone can grow in two directions (from the floor and the ceiling – stalagmites and stalactites) to eventually form a pillar. In some cases, the rocks appear to grow sideways as if resisting gravity. The limestone pillars serve as the foundation that supports the cave ceiling and the land far above. These images remind me of my world: my duties, expectations, and responsibilities function as my foundation. These day-to-day requirements restrain me while pulling me in different directions, and in this way, hold my world in place.

It would be interesting to use this yin/yang, smooth/rough combination method to create a cut away from an underground square frame that has a cave showing in it. The rough texture would be the frame, representing the underground and the smooth tunnel structure would represent the cave walls, as shown in Figure XVII (*Hold My World in Place #2*).

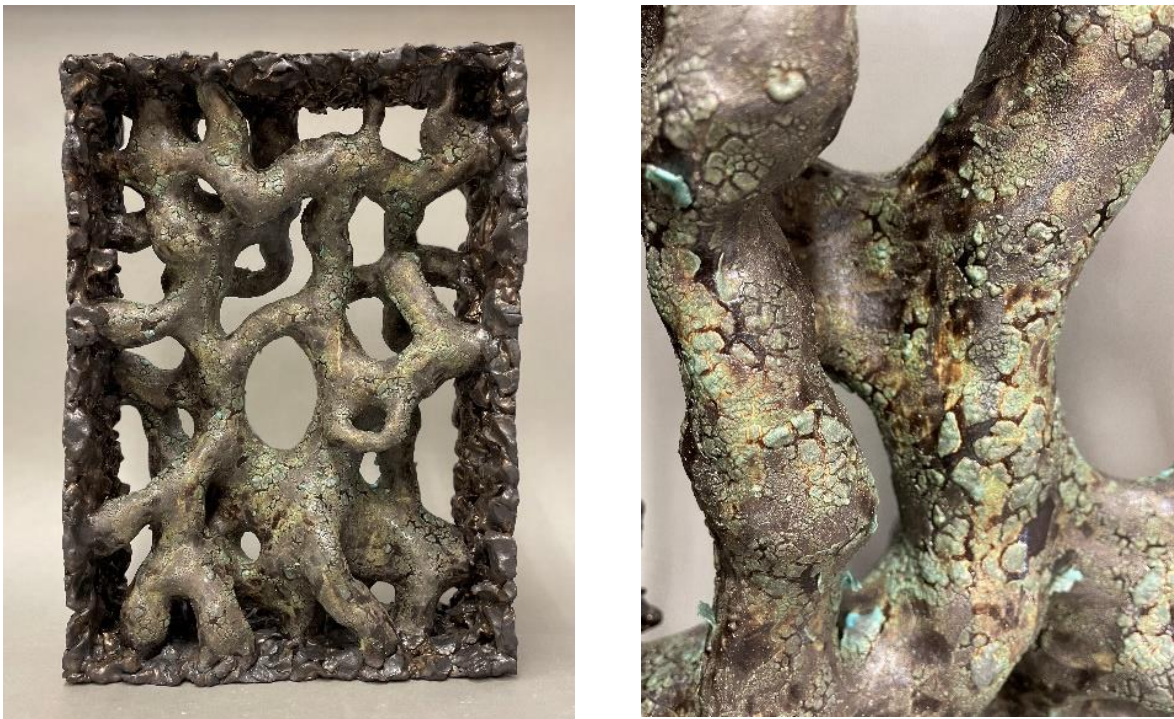


Figure XVII. *Hold My World in Place #2*, 2023 (left), with a detailed image (right).



The frame could be duplicated as the same size or displayed with different sizes, but each with a different cave structure in the middle, as illustrated in Figure XVIII. The idea is to be able to display them differently. They can stack vertically, horizontally, or pyramidal. The sculptures are seen through those tunnel gaps just like window screens, and they provide different scenes on both sides. In addition, it can be flipped on any of the four sides.



Figure XVIII. *Hold My World in Place* (#3, #2, #4), 2023, stoneware cone 6 oxidation, glazed.

The first piece, *Hold My World in Place #1* (Figure XIX), was high-fired in a gas kiln. The matt glaze color was unexpected, showing brownish copper-like spots in the blue glaze color. It creates an interesting, but quiet pattern, on the surface. The openings show that the inside tunnels are a dark glossy green color. The color transition is not obvious, but the glossy glaze on the interior helps to reflect light and illuminate the tunnel.



Figure XIX. *Hold My World in Place #1*, 2023, stoneware cone 10 reduction, glazed.

### **A Space Without Time**

Historically, many Buddhist monks would meditate in caves for years. In the sanctuary of the cave, they could be away from people and isolated within that space to avoid disturbances from the outside world. It was a benefit to be able to stay within such a cave space and eliminate interruptions and thus accumulate the chain of thoughts that exist without time. I understand, however, that I am currently bound to the moral world and have responsibilities – my graduate education, relationships, and children, etc. But fortunately, I am able to work on my clay works to create a similar environment.

In my research, I came across an interview from Arspiel for Beth Dary, a multi-media artist with the BFA from Syracuse University (Syracuse, NY) and the MFA from Memphis College of Art (Memphis, TN).<sup>11</sup> I was particularly interested in her installation series *Emersion* (Figure XX). This clay sculpture installation filled the gallery walls. She developed the “wall

*sculptures hanging in an array that would mirror the topography of marine environments where barnacles thrive*”. This installation inspired me to



Figure XX. Beth Dary, *Emersion*, 7' x 31' x 4", porcelain, 2010- present. Photo courtesy of Heriard-Cimino Gallery.<sup>11</sup>

use a yin/yang,

smooth/rough combination in clay to create a wall installation that invokes feelings and impressions of a monumental scale.

Initially I started a stoneware clay piece about 20 inches in length. But the appearance did not match the vision that I had in mind – the stoneware had too much grog and it looked heavy and dry. It did not possess the smooth and fluid surface that I desired unless I glazed the entire piece. But the glaze would cause the surface to be too glossy. Therefore, I went back to use a porcelain clay body similar to the first piece of this Series, *Eileen*, which was high-fired and unglazed.

This wall installation of the cave “*A Space Without Time*” uses sculptural pieces without colors nor glaze. I wanted to keep it simple to accent the details, while encouraging views of both the exterior and interior surfaces. Mounting these pieces on a dark blue wall allows the sculpture to “pop” in a manner similar to the walls and features of the ice cave (Figure XXII).



Figure XX1. *A Space Without Time*, 2024,  
porcelain cone 10 reduction (top) with a  
detailed image (left).

The smooth/rough combination, and the assembly of multiple pieces, allows me to create variations in size, shape, and format of my sculpture. In the installation on the wall, these pieces can be hung at any orientation and clumped together or widely distributed creating a three-dimensional motif that can be



Figure XXII. Antarctic ice cave.<sup>12</sup>

accommodated to any wall size, without losing continuity and perception. This composite structure invokes attributes of an ice cave (Figure XXII), which is constantly changing due to temperature, melting and re-freezing, and changing with the environment.<sup>12</sup>

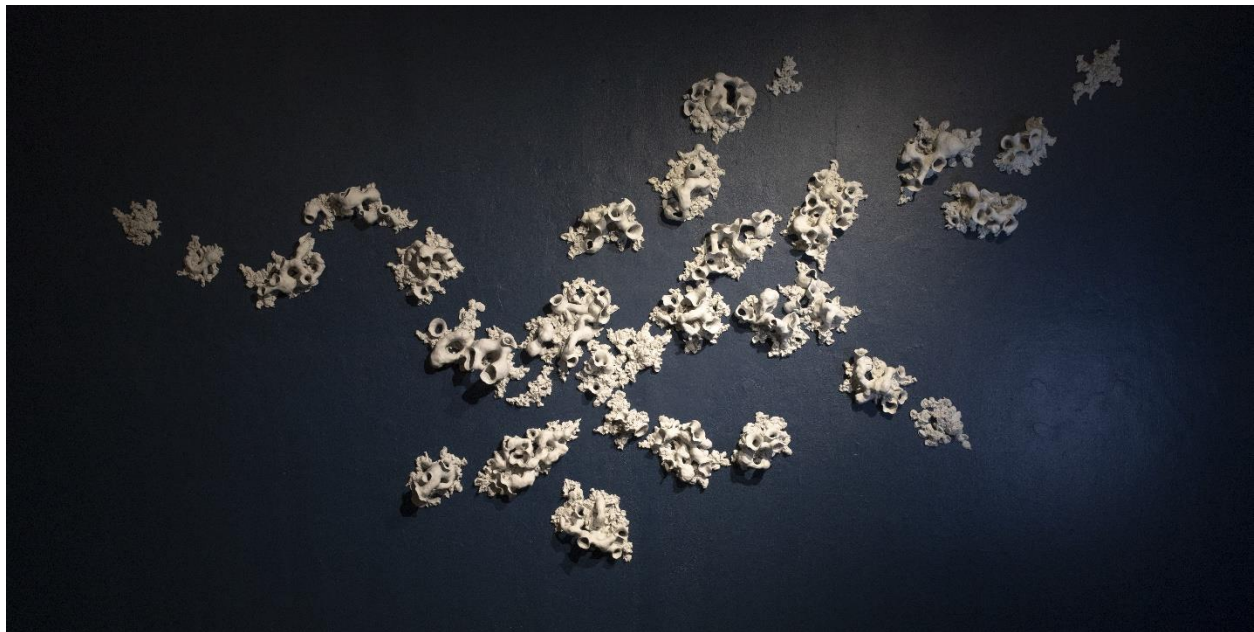


Figure XXIII. *A Space Without Time*, 2024 (as presented in the thesis exhibit).

Natural beauty surrounds us everywhere in our everyday life. It can blend with the architecture we live in, or it can stand out. But either way, we cannot separate ourselves from nature, because we live in the natural environment of the earth. The installation of “A Space without Time” on a wall provides a similar concept. It suggests another way of blending nature with our living environment, but also represents the concept of incorporating meditation into my daily activities. What I want to express in my work is that “timelessness” is right here with us. It is similar to the way our bodies breathe air in and out without conscience acknowledgement. But just like breathing, with a little bit of awareness, we realize that “A Space Without Time” has been right here all along.

## Conclusion

Looking back, my three years of studio practice at Syracuse University was similar to Buddhist Yogas meditating in isolated caves. This veritable vacation away from worldly responsibilities and interruptions, provided me a meditative “space without time”. The incorporation of meditation into daily activities such as my studio practice, was profitable to both my spiritual growth and creativity.

“Cave” was the object of nature that initially inspired me for my sculptural work, and through the progress of making sculptures, it gradually transformed my work. What started as vase-like sculptures, with a landscape form, transformed into the tunnel structures with ruffled openings, eventually further into open sculptures with more developed yin/yang characteristics. My work is now abstract and no longer about caves, but more broadly celebrating images and concepts of nature. The viewer can follow the tunnels and the ruffled edges lines and look into the details of the sculptures. By forcing the viewer to focus on observing the various aspects of the piece, I hope to help them release from the constraints of time in a manner similar to my focused practice of meditation, and thus creation in the studio, where I achieve a “*A Space without Time*”.

The journey of “learning to swim” and my dream of obtaining the MFA in ceramic art has provided me with a strong foundation for my art practice as I leave Syracuse University. In retrospect, as I look back at each series, I immediately see opportunities for new ideas and new sculptures. A window screen, for example, can be expanded to line up pieces with graded colors to provide a unique landscape perspective; the view can exchange rough and smooth surfaces that evolve from the ground, or hang from the ceiling, to create an underground landscape scene, again reminiscent of underground caverns.

These thoughts have helped me to open the door and prepare me for my next artistic journey and my future sculptural works.

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Grace Kerr worked in the fashion industry in New York City for almost 30 years. In 2009, she enrolled part-time in Queens College, City University of New York, in the BFA program with a focus on ceramics. There Grace met her mentor Sin-Ying Ho, who broadened her perspective of the Art world. Sin-Ying brought her to exhibitions to meet and see the works of other artists, to share and exchange ideas, and encouraged Grace to take risks and experiment on possible ways to create works of her ideas. In 2017, Grace met another important mentor, Bruce Dehnert, during a woodfire event at Peters Valley School of Craft in New Jersey. Grace was drawn to Bruce's knowledge of ceramics and his philosophy on the creation of art. Prior to enrolling in the MFA at Syracuse University in 2021, Grace joined Bruce as his studio assistant at Peters Valley School of Craft. This position also allowed her to experience and learn different techniques from visiting artists, and to develop alternative firing methods that served as a foundation for her research and practice during her MFA studies at Syracuse University.